

Stoke St Mary Parish Council

Minutes of a meeting of Stoke St Mary Annual Parish Council held on Thursday, 15th January 2026, at Stoke St Mary Village Hall at 7.30pm

Public Session

There were two Members of Public (MOP) in attendance. There were no questions.

25.59 Attendance and Apologies

Councillors Present: Cllr Daniel Fallance, Cllr Patricia Fallance, Cllr Colin Fisher (Chair), Cllr Rob Hossell, Cllr Rebecca Pow, Cllr Graeme Watt, Cllr Tania Watt
In attendance: Sarah Fisher (Clerk), Cllr Sarah Wakefield (Somerset Council (SC)),

25.60 Declarations of Interest – none declared

25.61 Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20th November, 2025, were circulated in advance of the meeting and were approved and signed by the Chair, with two minor changes;

25.53 remove "(from contingency)"

25.54 Volunteer Activities – replace "highway" with "footpath"

Cllr Wakefield was invited to give her report. She referred the meeting to her written report (January) which is available on the PC website.

***Council Tax** - Cllr Wakefield suggested that the 11% increase in council tax recently quoted in the press is not necessarily the increase that will be implemented or permitted by the government, but is the figure quoted to the government which would put Somerset on a par for council tax with other south west councils after a six year council tax free from 2010-16. SC operate their own council tax reduction scheme to help the less well off (as a result of which some £35m in council tax is foregone each year), in addition to the government's own council tax reduction requirements. Sale of assets needed this year to prop up budget but SC hope this will not be necessary next year. Budget 2026/2027 to be finalised end Feb/March.*

***North Curry travellers site** – awaiting update from legal team*

***Call for sites** – some 1600 sites interests received. First results not expected now until late summer. Section 18 due to start April so delay will impact this. Cllr Pow commented that at a recent Taunton Garden Town Advisory Board meeting, Jenny Clifford indicated call for sites would be reported on "early this year". Cllr Hossell enquired about phosphates neutrality issue. Cllr Wakefield reported that a recent Supreme Court case relating to a development near Wellington suggested Natural England advice could be ignored in relation to the satisfaction of pre-commencement conditions. Chair reported that he was still awaiting response from Cllr Mike Rigby re unrealistic housing figures – Cllr Wakefield confirmed Cllr Rigby has raised this with the government, but the government not budging. Chair would appreciate response from Cllr Rigby.*

Chair enquired of Cllr Wakefield re size of households on housing wait list. Cllr Wakefield estimates 70% of 13,000 households on waitlist are seeking one or two bedroom dwellings. Est 10,000 house builds held up by phosphate neutrality issue. Chair enquired re bed blocking; Cllr Wakefield reported that this is not a huge issue for Somerset as SC work closely with hospitals. Cllr Dan Fallance asked about the £52m savings that SC were projected to make by becoming a Unitary council. Cllr Wakefield said financial position would be far worse were it not for additional savings made.

The Chair thanked Cllr Wakefield for her support.

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25.62 Finance

a) Balances (as at 09/01/2026)

Current A/c:	£1477.09
Reserve A/c:	£5439.45
95 Day notice A/c:	£7073.31

CLlr Tania Watt confirmed these balances as correct (noting the date of balances stated on agenda is incorrect).

b) Expenditure approval:

i.	Parsons Landscapes inv 18505	61.76	APPROVED
ii.	SALC training inv 2547 & 2581	60.00	APPROVED

c) 2026/27 Budget – The draft budget was discussed and some clarifications made. Councillors agreed to maintain the precept at £11k for 2026/27

CLlr Wakefield left the meeting at 8.05pm

25.63. Clerk's report/action list from previous meeting

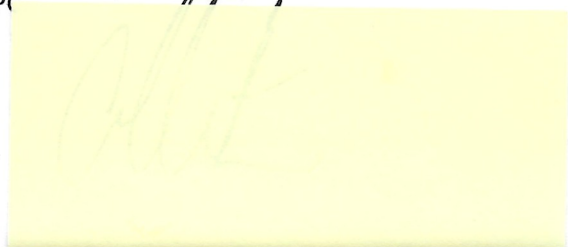
- a) **Fly tipping incident in May outside Stoke Farm** – Chair discussed this at recent LCN meeting with Nick Ryder of SC. As the case is over six months old, it is not possible to prosecute. Post meeting note – CLlr Wakefield forwarded a response from SC to her enquiries. SC were unable to find reference to the incident, and say they operate an “intelligence led approach” – PC remains puzzled as an automatic reply was received.
- b) **GoodSam scheme** – Clerk reported that this had been widely promoted, but it did not involve the PC as it was administered centrally by GoodSam, direct with volunteers.
- c) **Dates for Annual Parish Meeting** – clerk proposed this be brought forward to an earlier date than the usual May date (needs to be between 1st March and 1st June), so that Crown Estate plans for barns at Higher Broughton Farm could feature as topic for meeting. This would also alleviate Clerk's workload in May. Two suggested dates were Thurs 9th April and Thurs 16th April. Clerk to establish availability of village hall and date to be finalised at March PC meeting.
- d) **Grounds Maintenance contract** – contract with Parsons approved
- e) **Defibrillator in Shoreditch** – Clerk reported that British Heart Foundation (BHF) is funding free defibs under certain terms and conditions, though grant might not cover installation. Residents Association at Caravan Park in Shoreditch very keen for PC to lead on this. Clerk has approached owner of park requesting they host it and allow us to connect to electrical supply. When/if permission received, Clerk will apply for grant to BHF (applications close 28th Feb).

25.64 **Mapping Service subscription (Parish Online)** – Chair explained benefits of a mapping service, in particular with reference to planning and infrastructure. Parish Online has quoted £70 pa (and 10% discount). Proposal approved.

25.65 **To discuss whether to form a Staffing Committee** – it was agreed to consider this item at the end of the meeting, in closed session

25.66 **Period Risk Review** – CLlr Graeme Watt circulated a revised Risk Register in advance of the meeting, to all Councillors. Agreed this should be reviewed annually alongside budget setting (Jan meeting). Draft approved, but CLlr Graeme Watt highlighted that the Register would benefit from an additional risk category “Objectives and Strategy”, to reflect the PC's aims and plans. He anticipated the category initially covering risks for; i) planning and representing interest of communities, ii) highways, iii) flood control and, iv) Rights of Way. Ii) and iii) would be updated and moved from the other categories they are currently in. i) and iv) need to be drafted with the responsible Councillors. Today's approved Risk Register to be published on website and updated with the new categories when approved by PC

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25.67 Councillor Portfolios

Drainage/flood control/volunteers activities/highways – Cllr Graeme Watt reported that two volunteer activities had taken place since Nov meeting; i) survey of Blackbrook ii) clearance of Blackbrook, and as a result the brook is now running well. Planned work to ditches by Stoke Lane to be completed by contractor @ £500 (see min no 25.53). Phase B of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) work to be completed in Spring. Cllr Graeme Watt reported that SRA had visited before Christmas and were impressed with the results of the recent work. Future volunteer activities are planned, to clean/survey road signs across the parish – Cllr Graeme Watt will liaise with Kate Brown SC if any signs need replacing. Cllr Graeme Watt expressed his gratitude to volunteers. Cllr Pow commented on pollution that has been running down Ash Road from Greenways Farm, most likely caused by blocked underground drains which currently can only be cleared by Somerset Council with jetting equipment..

Traffic/speed management – Cllr Hossell reported there has been no further progress on Shoreditch speed limit change work, and therefore no discussion on likely costs for the PC. Broughton Lane – traffic lights in place until end Jan at Shoreditch end of Broughton Lane, with intermittent closures to Broughton Lane. Chair reported we are still waiting on SC to erect post for SID in Haydon. SC work on three month contract (which expires end Jan). Volunteer party will install SID as soon as post is erected.

Rights of Way – Cllr Pat Fallance – not much to report.

Play Area - Cllr Pat Fallance continues to monitor, and area remains neat and tidy, litter bin fine

Village Hall – Cllr Dan Fallance reported bookings down a little but still healthy. First Aid box to be reviewed but currently compliant. Village Hall committee are happy to support community social activities.

Police – not much to report though Cllr Dan Fallance observed that info from police seems to have dried up.

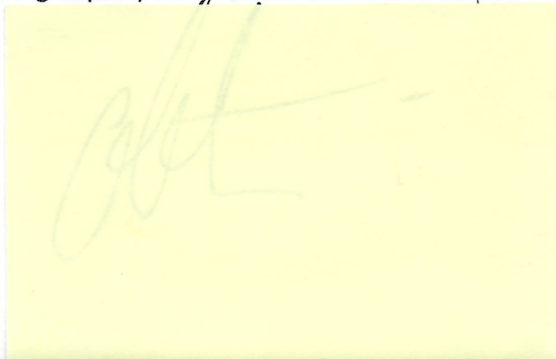
Taunton Garden Town Advisory Board – Cllr Pow attended meeting on 9th Jan. 1. Some discussion re what interest government is taking in Garden Towns since focus seems to be on New Towns programme. Jenny Clifford SC met with Homes England and was told govt interested in garden towns that can deliver early, but no commitment for future funding support. Cllr Pow asked for clarity on funding for garden towns team; their future seems unclear. 2. Firepool Master plan – out-of-date. SC commissioned “31 TEN” for a refresh – basically more of what was already proposed; flexibility, multiple users – housing, entertainment, student accommodation. 31 TEN suggested SC dispose of it potentially to an anchor tenant with conditions under a development agreement. Meeting not impressed with progress so far and wanted much more specific detail on which potential developers had been approached, and what the actual interest was in a very difficult development climate. Homes England update: - Garden town areas – Comeytrowe confirmed as having Accelerator Status provides some support, mainly advice to speed up the development; eg i) special time frame established where they don't need phosphate mitigation/one other site outside Taunton has been proposed by SC for Accelerator Fund, this is in the Yeovil area. Cllr Pow asked about Call for Sites (report originally expected Dec 2025). Jenny Clifford responded that they were in the midst of intense site assessments and first report expected early this year. New draft of NPPF is out – lots of different aspects in latest version compared to last iteration, esp re green wedge and green wedge boundaries. Jenny Clifford will report back at next meeting. Staplegrove West development underway. Work underway on Taunton waterways and navigation. Next meeting 17th or 24th April.

Local Community Networks (LCNs) – Chair attended meeting on 6th Jan 2026. Only two parishes represented. Chair believes there is a structural problem; – Chard has nothing in common with the other rural parishes. SC do not seem to use it as a listening forum (more a telling forum) so poor participation from parishes. Currently SC reviewing areas. Chair believes LCN should be split in two, dividing Chard from rural parishes.

Somerset Council Transport & Planning – Chair had asked Cllr Mike Rigby for his view on (unrealistic) housing targets but no response to date (see Cllr Wakefield's report above).

Half Moon Inn – good response to recent poll by local resident group re possible social activities while pub closed.

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25.68 Planning

Cllr Hossell circulated his report in advance of the meeting:

Somerset Local Plan – Nothing received yet on Call for Sites, despite assurances it would be published end 2025. Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025 received Royal Assent in Dec 2025, making it legally binding and implementing major reforms to UK's planning system, to speed up housing and infrastructure projects. As such, approvals for large developments could bypass local planning authorities.

Barns at Higher Broughton Farm – Chair and Cllr Hossell met with Crown Estate (CE), who have updated plans to incorporate eight properties, including three bungalows, with a less formal layout more in keeping with village. CE will progress further, with a view to having suitable visuals and plans, ideally by end of Feb, which will then be presented at a Parish meeting (possibly as part of Annual Parish Meeting, see 25.63 c) above).

No new planning applications.

37/25/0013 – erection of log cabin to be used as temporary dwelling at Stoke Court Farm, Ash Road, Stoke St Mary. Cllr Hossell submitted comments supporting application, noting applicant had agreed to neighbour's request to move it further south. Target decision date passed yet no progress.

The Parish Council agreed to move to a CLOSED SESSION
Two MoPs left the meeting.

25.65 To discuss whether to form a Staffing Committee – Councillors resolved to continue with a proportionate approach to managing our member of staff.

25.69 Date of next meeting: Thursday, 19th March 2026 at 7.30 pm

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm.

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